

ATONEMENT



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A BRIEF TREATISE ON THE ATONEMENT

BY
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PREFACE.

THIS brief treatise on the atonement has been prepared to meet a want felt by many who desire information on special Bible doctrines.

Both in the ministry and in the laity of the Church there are those who are not prepared to purchase expensive books on doctrinal subjects, nor have they the time always to devote to the perusal of such exhaustive volumes, but they are anxious to be informed on special subjects. To accommodate such persons, this little booklet has been written.

To treat a great subject in a form so condensed is no easy task, yet it is hoped that, though brief the treatise, the doctrine taught is set forth in language sufficiently plain, and will be readily comprehended.

E. B. K.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	ATONEMENT, - - - - - - -	7
II.	PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST, - - - -	19
III.	NECESSITY OF THE ATONEMENT, - -	27
IV.	THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT, - -	44
V.	VIEWS OF THE ATONEMENT HELD BY THE CHURCH OF THE UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST, - - - - - - -	64

THE ATONEMENT.

CHAPTER I.

ATONEMENT.

THE problem of sin, and Christ's solution of it, is the great factor in the gospel. The redemption of a world by the Son of God, and bringing it into conditions of perfect reconciliation with the Father by means of an atonement for sin, involves the most profound mysteries of the universe.

The word "atonement," by its derivation, shows or describes "the setting 'at one' or the reconciliation of two parties who have been estranged." Its equivalents, as used in the English Bible, are different forms of the root **כָּפַר** in the Old Testament, and *καταλλαγή* in the New. The verb **כָּפַר** means "to cover," and describes the effect of the sacrifices on the high priest and the altar at the

The Atonement

time of the original consecration;¹ also, of the annual sacrifices for the renewal of consecration of the high priest, his household, the people, and the tabernacle, on "the day of atonement."² It is frequently used in connection with sin and trespass offerings of various forms, as well as to describe the effect of the sacrifices offered on account of the nation and of individual Israelites, for guilt acknowledged or defilement obtained accidentally or otherwise.³

A derivative from the same root is used by Moses to describe his intercession at Sinai,⁴ and the effects of Aaron's incense offering,⁵ and of Phinehas's punishment, so promptly inflicted on Zimri.⁶ In these instances given, we have an example of the effects of those sacrifices not being limited by Levitical boundaries, but extending to cases and conditions beyond what they were appointed to deal with, and thus paving the way as a ground for the hope of an atonement that would ultimately be made to meet every human need arising from sin.⁷ In Ezekiel⁸ and in Second Chronicles,⁹ this same verb, where it refers to the

¹ Ex. 29:36; Lev. 8:15.

² Lev. 16:10.

³ Lev. 4:30; Num. 5:8.

⁴ Ex. 32:30.

⁵ Num. 16:46.

⁶ Num. 25:13.

⁷ Deut. 9:24.

⁸ Ezek. 16:63.

⁹ II. Chr. 30:18.

The Atonement

direct action of Jehovah, signifies "to forgive," "to pardon."

In the New Testament, the same thought finds expression in a variety of forms, as forgiveness,¹⁰ propitiation,¹¹ redemption. "But Christ having come a high priest of good things to come, through the greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this creation, nor yet through the blood of goats and calves, but through his own blood, entered in once for all into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption."¹² Also, as reconciliation, or atonement; that is, "making peace," implying two parties estranged. "For it was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of the cross; through him, I say, whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens."¹³ "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life; and not only so, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now

¹⁰ Eph. 4: 32.

¹¹ I. John 4: 10.

¹² Heb. 9: 12.

¹³ Col. 1: 19, 20; also, Rom. 5: 10, 11.

The Atonement

received the reconciliation.”¹⁴ This scripture in Colossians seems to be strangely far-reaching, and limits not the effects of Christ’s sacrificial death upon the cross to human guilt, but extends it to all things, whether in the heavens or upon the earth, just as the sacrifices offered by Moses, Aaron, and Phinehas swept by and beyond Levitical limitations.

I. The language used, both in the Old and the New Testaments, with reference to this subject, as already stated, implies the estrangement of two parties.

1. The parties estranged are God and man. The opening record of human history, as recorded in the second and third chapters of the Book of Genesis, tells the story of the two parties and their relations before and after the estrangement: God as the Creator and man as the created. First comes their fellowship and communion, then suddenly falls the dark shadow of their estrangement, which has marked every period of man’s history from that event. The interpreter of the sacred pages referred to, may, if it please him, call that part of the record an allegory, a scientific diagram, or a poetic illustration; nevertheless, the sad fact

¹⁴ II. Cor. 5: 18, 19.

The Atonement

remains that man is not yet out of the wilderness of his wanderings, and by whatever method we translate its records, their meaning is the same. Without intermission in the whole sweep of recorded history, human sin, sorrow, suffering, and guilt loom up against a divine background of insulted love, righteous indignation, and just retribution. Are these representations out of accord with what we know of human life from every available source?

2. The cause of the estrangement.

(1) On the man side, the estrangement is the direct consequence of his sin. Sin is lawlessness—rebellion against legally constituted authority. "Sin is the transgression of the law."¹⁵ Man's arbitrary refusal to submit to the law of God seems to be wrought into his very being, and to have become part of himself. "Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can it be."¹⁶ The life lived by man in sin reiterates this heart alienation from God, and the reflex influence of each sin committed upon the transgressor increases his alienation from God. Not only by

¹⁵ I. John 3:4. ¹⁶ Rom. 8:7.

The Atonement

every sin committed is the sinner rendered less conscious of his guilt, and his self-determination weakened, but additional guilt is incurred, and new terror is added to the curse of God's violated law. Each generation of our sorrow-smitten race, in every age and in every clime, has left its sad history in characters of blood. The first chapter in Romans is a standing comment on human history, and true to life in all lands.

(2) On the God side of this estrangement, the cause is his purity, holiness, and love; hence, the two natures—God holy, man unholy—are exact opposites. The purity of God cannot tolerate the impurity in man's nature. His nature being holy and loving, he cannot be indifferent to sin. Every attribute of God is at variance with sin, and he is represented as being angry with the wicked every day. His wrath must, and does rest upon the transgressor.¹⁷ But too much care cannot be taken in the study of the Word and in its interpretation, in order to distinguish clearly the difference in spirit of God toward man and man toward God. Man's attitude is one of hate, is vengeful and full of malice, but God's is the spirit of a loving father to an erring, disobedient, and

¹⁷ John 3:36.

The Atonement

prodigal boy, whose lost love the father is anxious to win back.

The language of the New Testament is matchless in this particular. With seemingly the greatest care, words and terms are used to avoid even the suspicion of any taint of human passion or feeling, or that any such shadow should fall upon the infinite purity of the divine and holy indignation. God is spoken of as an enemy to sin, but never as man's enemy. Man is declared to be the enemy of God. "While we were enemies."¹⁸ "Because the mind of the flesh is enmity against God."¹⁹ God is always represented as the one offended, and man as his offender. God never is represented in the Word as needing or demanding reconciliation for himself, but proposes reconciliation for man. "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself."²⁰ "Whom God set forth to be a propitiation" for us.²¹ The sacred Scriptures abound in like statements, ever expressing God's infinite tenderness and compassion for sinful humanity. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way

¹⁸ Rom. 5:10.

¹⁹ Rom. 8:7.

²⁰ II. Cor. 5:19.

²¹ Rom. 3:25.

The Atonement

and live.”²² The invitation to become reconciled always comes from God. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”²³ “Seek ye the Lord while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake his way, . . . and let him return unto the Lord, . . . for he will abundantly pardon.”²⁴

The atonement, then, as taught in the gospel, must not be construed to mean the taking away or the necessity of taking away any reluctance upon the part of God to forgive the penitent sinner, for no such reluctance anywhere is manifest in the divine Word; hence, no such device is needed, but, on the other hand, the atonement is God’s own provision, which he himself has made to remove all obstacles to communion, which sin has introduced, and forever eliminate the cause of the estrangement which obtains between God and man. God’s love is an infinite love, his mercy an infinite mercy, and his compassion an infinite compassion, hence his nature is unchangeable, and, as such, needs not to be condoned. But “the wages of sin is death,” nevertheless, and man is the

²² Ezek. 33: 11.

²³ Matt. 11: 28.

²⁴ Isa. 55: 6.

The Atonement

transgressor. Hence, the difficulty has been, and is, with him, and the moral government of God, under which he is, and which government he has violated, must be condoned.

3. The means of reconciliation or condonation. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, is the medium proposed by the Father, by which the obstacle, sin, has been set aside and "*a new and a living way*" opened to communion with God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."²⁵ Says Dr. Murray, "He himself is our peace,²⁶ he, the eternal Son of the eternal Father, is the Lamb foreknown indeed before the foundation of the world,²⁷ and the restoration of the broken harmony of the universe²⁸ springs from his eternal surrender of himself to do the Father's will." This eternal sacrifice, with its unfathomable roots fixed in the foreknowledge of God, was manifest in time, when "the Word was made flesh," and became effectual in the world's redemption, by a life of obedience to the will of the Father, which reached its culmination in his shameful death on the cross. Hence

²⁵ John 3: 16. ²⁷ I. Pet. 1: 20. ²⁸ Col. 1: 20, cf. Eph. 1: 10.

²⁶ Eph. 2: 14.

The Atonement

the atonement is always attributed especially to his death—"his blood," "his cross." "Having made peace through the blood of his cross."²⁹ "We were reconciled to God through the death of his Son."³⁰ "But God commendeth his own love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, shall we be saved from the wrath of God through him."³¹

II. In the divine Word, the cost of the atonement is presented from two sides:

1. As to the attitude of the Father in this, the world's greatest tragedy, Paul is very explicit: "He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not also with him freely give us all things?"³² "That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."³³ "The great love" of the Father to man while "he was yet a sinner," prompted "the gift of his Son," which made an atonement full and complete, and thus united the cord that had been broken by sin.

2. As to the effect of the cost on the Son. It

²⁹ Col. 1: 20.

³⁰ Rom. 5: 10.

³¹ Rom. 5: 8, 9.

³² Rom. 8: 32.

³³ Eph. 2: 7.

The Atonement

cost him his life. "Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all."³⁴ Also, "It is Christ Jesus that died, yea rather that was raised from the dead, who is at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us."³⁵ He suffered for us, and by his stripes we are healed.³⁶ The sufferings of the Christ in the flesh were human, hence we can form some conception of them. They were absolutely the result of his voluntary acceptance of all that the presence of sin entails upon man in this and in the future life. "But now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."³⁷ "They culminated, on the one hand, in an agonizing and ignominious death; on the other, in an unfathomable depth of spiritual suffering," which sweeps clear of human comprehension, when for a moment, as it were, even God seemed to have withdrawn his favor from the sufferer.

But as to the cost to the Father, the Bible is strangely silent, and man is surely left without the power to conceive what it implies. It is a mystery which the angels desired to look into. But, suffice it to say, the cost was such, coupled

³⁴ I. Tim. 2: 6.

³⁵ I. Pet. 2: 21-24.

³⁷ Heb. 9: 26.

³⁶ Rom. 8: 34.

The Atonement

with the sacrifice, that in the very highest degree it was a satisfactory ransom to the Divine Majesty, of such efficacy as to atone for the world's sin. The divine government was vindicated, the majesty of the law sustained, justice satisfied, and man reconciled to God. As Bishop Butler well says: "If the Scripture has, as surely it has, left this matter of the satisfaction of Christ mysterious, left somewhat in it unrevealed, all conjectures about it must be, if not evidently absurd, yet, at least, uncertain." But this we know, God accepts the ransom and man is redeemed.

CHAPTER II.

PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST.

THE Epistle to the Hebrews, which is chiefly devoted to the high priesthood of Christ, serves as a key to explain the relation of the priesthood with its sacrifices, under the Old Testament, to Christ Jesus as high priest under the New Testament or in the New Covenant. "For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the ashes of a heifer, sprinkling them that have been defiled, sanctify unto the cleanness of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of a new covenant, that a death having taken place for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first covenant, they that have been called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance."¹ It was foreign to the

¹ Heb. 9: 13-15.

The Atonement

thought of a Jew that God could be approached in any other way than by sacrifice. Hence, under the law, the priest and his sacrifices constituted the chief factor in Hebrew worship. "And according to the law, I may almost say, all things are cleansed with blood, and apart from the shedding of blood there is no remission."²

1. In the New Covenant, Christ is both high priest and sacrifice, himself the victim, self-offered, "who gave himself a ransom for all."³ He was "made perfect through suffering." His life was one of trial. Dark clouds often enveloped him as his sacred feet pressed the rugged steps about the blue Galilee, the Jordan plains, and the rock-ribbed Judean hills. His was a life of perfect self-surrender and sacrifice to the loving service of his brethren, in trustful obedience to his Father's will; but his sweet and holy submission to death on the cross for a lost world, including his betrayer and murderers, was his crowning glory, and gave the broadest possible expression of his obedience and undying love. In this tragedy on Calvary culminated his offering for sin, and settled forever its completeness. In

² Heb. 9: 22.

³ I. Tim. 2: 6.

The Atonement

this tragedy, the divine condemnation of sin fell upon Christ and is exhausted by his death. This is the significant, ultimate fact of his death, and makes it sin-annulling, and this, we might say, contains the gist of the apostolic theory of the atonement.

2. Christ as high priest is out of the ordinary. He was not a member of the family of Levi, but of Judah, therefore not a priest by inheritance; but, like Melchisedec, a priest of the most high God, "named of God a high priest after the order of Melchisedec."⁴ In the sacred Scriptures, everywhere, and especially in the Epistle to the Hebrews, when reference is made to his priestly character, special regard is had to his personal qualification for the high priesthood. His divine and human nature is especially brought out and set in a positive light. The first chapter of this Epistle is chiefly devoted to Christ, and sets forth his perfect fitness to represent the family of mankind, as its high priest at the sacrificial altar, its mediator, intercessor, and advocate at the court of heaven. His name is above every other name, his nature, human and divine, "God manifest in the

⁴ Heb. 5: 10.

The Atonement

flesh," the Godhead bodily in him. This divine human personality, Jesus Christ, as the head of our race, presents himself as the sacrificial victim for sin on our behalf. The act was strictly voluntary. "I lay it down of myself."⁵ His soul was made an offering for sin. "When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin."⁶ Here Christ, in the analogy of the Old Testament sacrifice, is the victim, surrendering himself to death, and confessing sin, not his own, but of man, and freely accepting this awful penalty passed upon us, knowing that it is just. "Because Christ also suffered for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God; being put to death in the flesh."⁷

3. The blood of the victim under the law was recognized as the life, and in it centered the atoning merit of the sacrifice. So also under the new covenant, all who enter into Christ and are thus saved, are represented as having been sprinkled by the blood of Christ. "Unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."⁸ "For ye are not come unto a mount that might be touched, . . . but ye are come unto mount

⁵ John 10: 18.

⁶ Isa. 53: 10.

⁷ I. Pet. 3: 18.

⁸ I. Pet. 1: 2.

The Atonement

Zion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable hosts of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, and to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaketh better than that of Abel.”⁹ Jesus himself emphasizes this new-covenant relation of the believer in the Last Supper when, with cup in hand, he says, “For this is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins.” Thus each believer is commanded to eat of the body, broken, and to drink of the blood, shed, of the atoning sacrifice, the Son of God. And as the great High Priest, in the power and might of that blood, he has passed into heaven and become the world’s mediator and advocate forever, at the court of heaven. “For Christ entered not into a holy place made with hands, . . . but into heaven itself, now to appear before the face of God for us.”¹⁰ And thus the resurrected Christ and his blood shed, ever constitute a true and living bond of union, forever uniting the

⁹ Heb. 12: 18-24.

¹⁰ Heb. 9: 24.

The Atonement

whole family of man to man and to the fatherhood of God.

Therefore, the life lived by our blessed Lord in perfect obedience to the will of the Father, and his voluntary death upon the cross, thereby vindicating the majesty of the divine government and meeting, full and complete, the claims of divine justice, accomplished the atonement made for the sins of all men. Paul, in the Epistle to the Colossians, first chapter, in classic style, sets forth the true import of the atonement in its broadest and most comprehensive sense. He declares: "It was the good pleasure of the Father that in him should all fulness dwell; and through him to reconcile¹¹ [atone]¹² all things unto himself, having made peace through the blood of his cross; . . . whether things upon the earth, or things in the heavens." In this twentieth verse is contained the gist of the atonement, and from it radiates the many beautiful shades of meaning and its effects, in which the term is used in the chapter. (1) "Meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light";¹³ (2) delivered from the

¹¹ Col. 1: 19, 20.

¹² Three forms of the word in Greek are used, the noun, the verb, and the intensive form — καταλλαγή, καταλλάσσω, ἀποκαταλλάττω.

¹³ Col. 1: 12.

The Atonement

power of darkness and translated into the kingdom of the Son of his love;¹⁴ (3) "redemption, the forgiveness of our sins";¹⁵ (4) promise of a resurrection and life from the dead;¹⁶ (5) making peace by the blood of his cross;¹⁷ (6) the removal of blame and taking away of reproof;¹⁸ (7) the winning back of lost love;¹⁹ (8) human suffering in fellowship with the afflictions of Christ interpreted;²⁰ and, finally, the climax is reached by making known "what is the riches of the glory of this mystery . . . which is Christ in you, the hope of glory."²¹

Thus the effect of the atonement sweeps out of the way every obstacle, and eliminates all estrangement between God and man, introduced by sin. It is God's panacea for destroying the works of the devil. For, "to this end was the Son of God manifested that he might destroy the works of the devil." Understood in its true spiritual reality and meaning, the blood of the cross reveals to man the true nature of his guilt and his relation to God. It also reveals to him God's love, and love's triumph over sin, thus winning back to God the lost love of our fallen race.

¹⁴ Col. 1: 13.
¹⁵ V. 14.

¹⁶ V. 13.
¹⁷ V. 20.

¹⁸ V. 22.
¹⁹ V. 21.

²⁰ V. 24.
²¹ V. 27.

The Atonement

Thus two ends are accomplished by the atonement; namely, the divine government vindicated and man reconciled to God. Both in the life and in the death of Christ was God's love so forcefully and practically manifested to man, that he discovered a friend in him whom he had always mistaken as his enemy, and man's love was turned back to God. This is what we are to understand by that oft-quoted scripture, "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not reckoning unto them their trespasses."²² It is this infinite, matchless love of God revealed in Jesus Christ that breaks down and conquers man's rebellious, sinful nature and develops a conscience and a character in him akin to the spirit that prompted the atonement.

²² II. Cor. 5: 19.

CHAPTER III.

NECESSITY OF THE ATONEMENT.

THE central truth of the Christian system is that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and his mission to this world, and work in relation to sin, are the supreme theme of the gospel. To eliminate or ignore the first is to destroy the system. To deny or reject the second is to make the gospel of "none effect." In these great truths center all of human hope and man's complete deliverance and freedom from sin and its far-reaching effects. Evil, as sin, is so virulent and antagonistic to good, purity, and righteousness, that there must be a moral necessity in God, demanding its just condemnation. A moral necessity, I say, which springs from his purity, his love, his goodness, his wisdom, his justice, yes, from every moral attribute of his exalted nature; for sin, as such, is transgression of law, treason and rebellion against the government of God. As Father, Judge, and

The Atonement

Lord of the universe, sin separates man from God, and severs all these holy relationships, the severance of which, and its effects upon the sinner, are what the Scriptures call the wrath of God, coming upon the children of disobedience.¹

Now, the atonement as set forth elsewhere, contains the redemptive price paid for man's redemption, a satisfaction rendered to God as judge and governor of the universe. But it implies and includes much more than a "price paid." True, in this ransom, "the blood of Christ," paid, is the sacrifice, the oblation, the satisfaction for sin, but, in addition to all this, there is secured, by means of the atonement, not only "reconciliation of the world unto himself," but also, through the Holy Spirit, the regeneration of the sinner who repents of his sins and, by faith, accepts Christ as his redeeming Lord.

It is an unsolved problem which is the greatest, the act done, the price paid, or the mysterious provision by which the lost, depraved soul of man is renewed, purified, and born into the kingdom of God. These two facts are so interwoven in the atonement, as set forth in the Scriptures, that it

¹ Eph. 5: 6.

The Atonement

is not possible to treat the one without implying the existence of the other. The necessity of the atonement is no more strongly emphasized in the Scriptures than is the necessity of a change of heart. The world's conscience must be formed by the atonement, to which it makes its appeal, if the world would be lifted out of its sins. This is one phase of its mission.

If man had been redeemed by Christ's death, and at the same time no expedient provided for his moral cleansing, we cannot conceive how endless happiness and eternal glory could have been his; for the two are directly at war with each other. Moral impurity is sin, and "the wages of sin is death," death to happiness, death to eternal glory. True, "Christ died for our sins,"² but, on the other hand, "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin."³ Hence in the "atoning sacrifice" two elements are manifest: first, its covering of sin or its expiation; second, its cleansing element. These two elements, full and complete in the atonement, meet every need of man in respect to his sin. Indeed, the two go hand in hand, the atonement and its effects, the ransom

¹ I. Cor. 15: 3.

² I. John 1: 7.

The Atonement

paid and the end accomplished, the covering or expiation of sin, the vindication of the government of God, the lifting up of fallen humanity in a sense that enables him under grace to form a character and live a life acceptable to God, freedom from the bondage of death, hell, and the grave, and the blessings of an endless life in immortality and in eternal glory.

The different theories of the atonement, which are not a few, will be considered later and in a separate section, but here it is proper to remark that while these theories differ widely at certain points, the differences are more of opinion than of fact. At least, there are two essential facts in which they all agree; namely, that man's estrangement from God by sin was the occasion of the atonement, and that Jesus Christ, offered up, was the atoning sacrifice. A clear conception of the occasion, and the necessity of the atonement, with its effects in a comprehensive sense, is of primary importance to an intelligent belief and conformity to it.

In that the word "atonement" has been explained in the opening pages of this treatise, we pass directly to the fact of its occasion. In this

The Atonement

realm, theory finds no place, but the hard problem of facts confronts the honest investigator in his search for truth. Human sin is the cause of the estrangement between God and man, on the one hand, and the occasion of the atonement on the other. Then, does this occasion exist in fact, that is, is man a sinner? That there is a principle of evil which dominates man and holds him in the most abject servitude is a fact which every page of human history verifies. And this evil, sin, is just as broad as the family of mankind. It is manifest, not only in the life of every generation of the family of Adam, but in the individual life of each adult person composing every generation of our race. It rises up in the human soul in the true spirit of the tyrant, and, under its sway, its victim tramples under foot every right of man, sets at naught the voice of conscience, spurns what he recognizes,—“the Word” of God,—and sacrifices his reason and judgment at the shrine of what he knowingly and intelligently recognizes as evil and only evil.

This brief picture is not overdrawn. You have met it and I have met it in the world's best civilization, in this opening decade of the twentieth

The Atonement

century. And what is most appalling is the fact that, as a rule, man knows that the bad life he lives is a sin against God; he sins against light and knowledge, and yet he regards it not, but hopes somehow for pardon and a transformation of character in the end. Evil, sin, is so manifest in the history of our race that even if the Word of God were silent on the subject, man would be left without excuse, for it is as manifest that it is a law of the universe that "evil shall slay the wicked," and that an individual or people who refuse to have God in their knowledge God gives up "unto a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not fitting; being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malignity,"—as it is that the law of gravitation will force a lump of lead through a vacuum. Is not this awful truth now being retaught by the facts brought to light by the unearthing of the buried cities of the ancient world's best civilization? Read a lesson from the paintings on the walls of the pleasure-houses in Pompeii, or the sad, sad story of human sin, whether from the valley of the Euphrates or the Nile.

The Atonement

But the Word of God is not silent on the subject of human sin. From its opening pages to its close, sin and its condemnation enter into the warp and woof of its message. "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually."⁴ "Is not thy wickedness great?"⁵ "From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and festering sores."⁶ "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."⁷ "Therefore, as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men, for that all sinned."⁸ Thus the burden of God's message to man is either directly or indirectly connected with human sin, and from what man knows of the direct effects of it on his race in this life, and from what the Word of God declares it to be, is surely sufficient to show an occasion for an atonement for sin. Sin is the trap in which man is caught, and he has conscious knowledge that he is in the awful trap, by actual acts of vice which are forbidden by every law of his higher nature,

⁴Gen. 6: 5.

⁵Job 22: 5.

⁶Isa. 1: 6.

⁷Jer. 17: 9.

⁸Rom. 5: 12.

The Atonement

as well as by the divine Word. He knows by actual experience and by observation that "evil shall slay the wicked," and that "the wages of sin is death." This is the condition of man that has confronted every son of Adam's race, and is both the occasion and necessity for an atonement. The sin must be covered or expiated, and a new life given to the sinner, or the penalty for sin must ensue.

Now to meet these two necessary conditions, Jesus Christ is presented in the Scriptures as the atoning sacrifice. Not one of the sacred writers halted or, in any sense, swerved from a clear, unequivocal statement of the fact that Jesus "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,"⁹ and that "he died for all, that they which live should no longer live unto themselves, but unto him, who for their sakes died and rose again."¹⁰ In the gift of this sacrifice to atone for the world's sin, the Scriptures represent it as mutual upon the part of the Father and the Son. "For God so loved the world, that *he gave* his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have eternal life."¹¹ "Christ Jesus

⁹ I. Cor. 15: 3.

¹⁰ II. Cor. 5: 15.

¹¹ John 3: 16.

The Atonement

who gave himself a ransom for all.”¹² Criticism may exhaust itself over the inexpediency and the injustice of one, perfectly innocent, suffering for the guilty, and human reason may set up its protests on this and other grounds, against the conception of the atonement as plainly taught in the Word of God, yet the fact nevertheless stands out distinct and clear that Christ died, “the just for the unjust.” “Because Christ also suffered [died] for sins once, the righteous for the unrighteous.”¹³ It matters not what may be our conception of Christ’s suffering, vicarious or not, the fact nevertheless stands sure that he offered himself up, and thereby atoned for the world’s sin. The truth is, it was not the suffering but the personality, Christ offered up, which makes the atonement vicarious. In all the sacrificial offerings of the Old Testament it was not the suffering of the victim slain which made the sacrifice meritorious for sin, but *the victim offered up*. Just so it is the “Lamb of God, offered up,” that takes away the sin of the world.

Man may not be able to fathom all the mystery connected with the atonement. He may not see

¹² I. Tim. 2: 6.

¹³ I. Pet. 3: 18.

The Atonement

how a just being, under the divine government, can assume the responsibility of an unjust being, and lift the penalty from the shoulders of the condemned, in accord with strict justice, but if the just being who assumes all this responsibility possesses the power of so vitalizing the unjust one, whom he befriends, to a degree that his unjust nature departs from him and he becomes in a sense "a new creature," like his deliverer, human reason would say that that is the right thing to do. All this, and even more, is implied in the atonement as set forth in the Gospels. The becoming "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ,"¹⁴ is a direct result of Christ's work in the solution of the problem of man's sin. It is presumption to presume to fathom the depths of the divine nature, yet it is equally presumptuous to charge God with folly or attribute injustice to him.

No doubt the fact of human sin was before the mind of God from eternity, but to develop in the divine government in time, and that Christ, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world," as an atonement for sin, was to meet this contingency in time. "But now once at the end of the

¹⁴ Rom. 8: 17.

The Atonement

ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself." This, according to the Scriptures, is clear, that the atonement, the sacrifice is in the personality of Christ offered up, upon the cross, and that the redemption of the world is its effect.

In man's sinful state, which rendered him utterly helpless, Christ came to his rescue and became his substitute; and, astounding fact as it is, he died for sinners. Man's sin created or produced the occasion of Christ's voluntary death. At this point, unless man's eyes are holden, he may have a faint conception of the enormity of sin; for, is it possible to conceive that infinite wisdom, goodness, and justice would devise a scheme of redemption that would involve the sacrificial death of the Son of God unless, in the divine government, in relation to man's moral agency, there existed an absolute necessity for it?

The fact that the atonement is God's plan, not man's, of saving the world, lost in sin, is evidence that it is necessary, just, wise, and good, and in strict accord with the divine government. Indeed, we find this to be true, that the Governor of the universe, in so far as we are capable of seeing

The Atonement

and knowing, carries forward his natural administration in the affairs of the world by atonements and mediations, and his moral government, according to the Scriptures, is conducted on the same principle. Good and just men often suffer on account of the rashness and injustice of evil-doers. This is often of necessity,—that the just and good suffer,—but in the case of Christ it was voluntary; and unless the objector to the atonement could show clearly what scheme would secure man's deliverance from sin, and vouchsafe to him eternal life before a revelation of that fact or God's scheme to do so was made known to man, he would be utterly incapable of passing a correct judgment upon the scheme after it was revealed, and especially so unless he could show that God's scheme is out of accord with reason and fails to accomplish the end proposed. We repeat: The atonement is God's plan to save men, ruined and lost by sin; hence its necessity, as a fact, exists. Christ, offered up, is the atoning sacrifice, for surely, if there was any atonement in his mission and work among men, it was in his death.

In his life-work, up to his agony in the garden, there was nothing priestly; all was preparatory.

The Atonement

The good, pure, noble life he lived was just such a life as every man should and ought to live. His deeds of kindness and mercy were such as the world has ever needed, but there was no atonement, no ransom, in all this. As an example and a lesson to the world it was all-important. It all led up to the crowning events in his life, yes, the crowning event in all history, when he assumed the functions of the priesthood, made his soul an offering for sin, entered as high priest into the holy of holies, and as priest and victim offered himself up as the world's sacrifice for its sin, and passed into heaven, where he ever liveth to make intercession for us. So, according to the Scriptures, death, without Christ, makes no atonement, and Christ, without death, makes no atonement, but Christ offered up is God's accepted sacrifice of atonement for the world's sin. This fact cannot be too strongly emphasized and too intelligently believed. It is the extremely narrow limits assigned to the atonement by one class of theologians, and the undue latitudinarianism by another, that have distorted the doctrine of the atonement, and made it offensive to man. But, as presented in the Word of God, it is strictly in accord with right reason,

The Atonement

and proves the power of God unto the salvation of every one who believes.

In the sufferings of Christ, it must be understood and definitely stated that he died for man's sin and not for his own; for he was the "sinless one" of our race. Also, his sufferings were not the infliction of punishment upon the innocent, instead of the guilty. His sufferings were not punishment as such. Man remained guilty, Christ guiltless. No transfer of demerit obtained. At the cross beneath, as on the throne above, Christ forever remained and remains the sinless Son of God; but, entering into humanity willingly and without reserve, he took "on himself," as one has said, "all its limitations, burdens, pains, and sorrows." "Christ lived and died with man and for man."¹⁵ In this tragedy he was both substitute and representative for man. In all this, there is and can be no reflection on God and his justice.

Says Dr. Phillips Brooks in his reflections on this tragedy: "My friends, far be it from me to read all the deep mystery that is in this picture. Only this I know is the burden and soul of it all, this truth, that sin is a horrible, strong, positive thing,

¹⁵ Van Dyke's "Gospel for a World of Sin," p. 162.

The Atonement

and that not even divinity grapples with him and subdues him except in strife and pain. What pain may mean to the infinite and divine, what difficulty may mean to omnipotence, I cannot tell; only I know that all that they could mean, they mean here. This symbol of the blood bears this great truth,—which has been the power of salvation to millions of hearts, and which must make this conqueror the Saviour of your hearts, too,—the truth that only in self-sacrifice and suffering could even God conquer sin. Sin is never so dreadful as when we see the Saviour with that blood upon his garments; and the Saviour is never so dear, never wins so utter and so tender a love, as when we see what it has cost him to save us. Out of that love, born of his holy suffering, comes the new impulse after a holy life; and so when we stand at last, purified by the power of grateful obedience, binding our holiness, and escape from our sin, close to our Lord's struggle with sin for us, it shall be said of us that we have washed our robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."¹⁶

No doubt there is much in the plan of human

¹⁶ Phillips Brooks, *Sermons*, vol. I., p. 53.

The Atonement

redemption, as conceived by the Infinite Father, and completed in Christ's death upon the cross, hidden in deep mystery, due to the limitations of human knowledge, yet this is plain, that the sovereign Ruler of the universe so honors the moral law by which he governs the world that even the "Son of his love" coming into union and communion with man could not, and did not escape the consequences of man's sin; that is, he did not escape from suffering in lifting the burden of sin from the shoulders of the sinner.

Says Dr. Van Dyke: "But because our sins deserved punishment, Christ, having become one with us, endured the shame and the cross, poured out his soul unto death and was numbered with the transgressors, suffered and died as the human life of God, because suffering and death have justly come upon the world of sin." Thus this scriptural view of the atonement puts the work of Christ in a vital relation to man's sin, and recognizes God's condemnation of sin as a real thing, and makes a real and intelligent connection between the death of Christ and man's salvation. In a word, it is the only intelligent working basis for man's hope of deliverance from sin. Also, this

The Atonement

view of the atonement forever binds men to Christ, making them ever dependent on him. Man's only standing before God is, and ever must be in the blood of the crucified One. Christ, therefore, is the all and in all, the Alpha and the Omega of the world's redemption.

CHAPTER IV.

THEORIES OF THE ATONEMENT.

THE doctrines of Christianity are set forth by man in theories and systems. The development of theology and its progress are recorded in the different theories that have obtained and swayed the church in her history. The sacred Scriptures is the true source and center, directly or indirectly, from which all the doctrines of the church rise. No one human mind is sufficiently broad and penetrating to fathom the inexhaustible fountain of God's Word. As a result, as men have looked into that Word, in search of truth, no one has seen all of the truth, but every sincere truth-seeker who has looked in has found *some* truth. On that same truth, he has constructed his doctrines of Christianity and formulated his theories. Hence, the correctness of his doctrines and the validity of his theories always depend upon the measure of his insight into the Word of God, and

The Atonement

the degree of clearness of vision he possesses in interpreting the divine oracle. Therefore, error in doctrine or in theory is more the result of a lack of ability to comprehend the deep things of God's Word than of moral perversity upon the part of the theologian.

The doctrine of the atonement is not an exception to the foregoing statements. The church, in all her history, has definitely recognized the doctrine of the atonement to have its roots deeply centered in the Old Testament, and while, according to the Revised Version, the word "atonement" does not occur once in the New Testament, yet true scholarship and correct criticism see clearly that the doctrine of the atonement is as forcefully and as distinctly taught in the New Testament as in the Old. Hence the doctrine, as such, in the New Testament, is not a mere quibble over words, but is a matter of fact. The straight language of the Holy Oracle is: "For I delivered unto you first of all that which also I received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; and that he was buried; and that he hath been raised on the third day according to the scriptures."¹ From this declaration not one of the apostles de-

¹ I. Cor. 15: 3.

The Atonement

serted, but all concurred in it. Behind this fact the early Christians did not attempt to go; but clear and direct as the Word of God is on this subject, yet in course of time men began to attempt an explanation, and, as a result, many theories of the atonement have been developed in the history of the Christian church. Of these theories, it may be said in truth, no one of them contains all the truth, and no one of them is destitute of some truth. In setting forth these theories in this brief treatise, only the more prominent can be brought to view:

I. The patristic theory.

The sacrificial conception of the Old Testament, and the language used by the apostles in the New Testament were strictly adhered to by the church fathers from the days of the apostles down to and after the Council of Nice. They, however, failed to express their own views definitely on the subject, but, as a rule, it is manifest that they more or less clearly held to and taught the doctrine of expiation and satisfaction by the death of Christ, which in a sense subsequently became the faith of the whole church, down to the days of Anselm, who died in 1109.

The Atonement

The jewel in the apologetical literature of the fathers is the Epistle to Diogenetus. It rivals in spirit and impressiveness all early writings of this class. On the atonement, it is clear and distinct. "He sent him 'as sending God' and as a man unto men."² "God in pity took on him our sins, and himself parted with his own Son as a ransom for us, the holy for the lawless, the just for the unjust. . . . In whom was it possible for us lawless and ungodly men to have been justified, save only in the Son of God? Oh, the sweet exchange . . . that the iniquity of many should be concealed in one righteous man."³

In the second century, Irenæus of Asia Minor came into church history. He was intensely practical in mind, somewhat Johannine in thought and well versed in the Scriptures. The redemption of the world through the incarnate Christ is the central truth created in his system. In treating of the atonement, he says, "The death of Christ was a substitution for our death, and that he redeemed us with his own blood and gave his soul for our souls and his own flesh for our flesh,"⁴ or words to that effect. "He gave his life as a ransom for

² Epist. to Diogenetus, C. 7. ³ C. 9. ⁴ Adv. Hæer V. Pref.

The Atonement

those in captivity." That is, man was in captivity to Satan, and Christ as high priest propitiated God, "dying that man might come out of condemnation." Christ's obedience is his central thought, by which obedience he canceled Adam's disobedience, destroyed sin, and inspired man with a new spiritual life, thereby overcoming death, hell, and the grave.

Irenæus does not use the term "ransom" as a price paid to Satan for man's redemption, a thought which came later in church history, but recognized Christ, offered up upon the cross, as a vicarious sacrifice for man's sin. With him the atonement is objective and necessary, and has a very essential place in the moral order of God's government, which sin, through Satan, has invaded.

In the third century, Origen takes up the work of Christ as taught by Irenæus and the current views of Christ's conquest over Satan, by means of which man is delivered from the powers of evil. True, this great preacher touches on that vague conception of "a deceit practiced upon Satan," who is represented "as accepting the soul of Christ as a ransom, not knowing that he could not en-

The Atonement

dure a sinless soul.”⁵ But Origen was too broad to be dominated by such vagaries. The death of Christ with him was a vicarious death in behalf of the race, and the Old Testament sacrifices were typical of the tragical death of Christ on Calvary for the sin of the world. In his thought the atonement is necessary, the value of which is measured only by the value of the blood shed.

In the fourth century the doctrines of Origen and his predecessor on the atonement were taken up and developed by Gregory of Nyssa. He developed the conception of a “ransom” paid by Christ to Satan for the redemption of man. His theory was that God would deprive Satan of all ground for complaints of injustice in dealing with him. While God possessed the power to rescue man from the deceiver, arbitrarily, to whom he had voluntarily surrendered, yet he would not, but proposed to deliver him by purchase. Christ was the ransom proposed. Satan was attracted by Christ’s miraculous power in working miracles, and was willing to surrender man in exchange for Christ. But Jesus being veiled in humanity, Satan was deceived and lost all, for he could not

⁵ E. g. C. Celcum, VII. 17, 1. 31.

The Atonement

endure God unveiled, neither was he, a deceiver, entitled to any ransom; therefore, it was given to God, not of need or demand of price, but because by the incarnation, Christ, coming in touch with man's sin, could purify him and make him holy. It is surpassingly strong, that even Augustine resuscitated the vague and unscriptural theory of a relation of the death of Christ to Satan. After man's voluntary self-surrender, Satan's dominion existed of right, but in that he inflicted death upon Christ, the sinless one, in right he forfeited that dominion.

The interpretation of this phase of the atonement by these men makes Jesus the price paid to Satan for man's redemption. Their theory was, God paid the price to Satan for man's release, and, as a result, man was set free. But the whole scheme was a deception. In the first place, Satan had deceived man and enslaved him. God now, in turn, tricked the devil and, by proposing and giving the life of "his only begotten Son," secured man's release. They found all this from such passages as Colossians 2:15, and Hebrews 2:14. This strange and unscriptural interpretation dominated many theologians and influenced

The Atonement

the church for almost a thousand years. With these church fathers such vagaries must have been a matter of opinion only, and their interpretations on that phase of the atonement only speculation, and not the result of their clear, intelligent faith in the sacrificial death of the Son of God. This is quite evident from their views on the general subject of the atonement. As we have already said of Irenæus, Origen, and Gregory, so also we may say of Augustine. He does not confine himself to this phase or dogma of the atonement. God's righteousness prompted his punishment of sin. He finds two reasons for Christ's incarnation: First, "that by suffering all things for us, he might deliver us from the bonds of sin"; and, secondly, "that he might set us free from its power."⁶ "He took on himself, being without guilt, our punishment, that he might put away our guilt, and put an end to our punishment."⁷

As to the Greek and Latin fathers, it may be said that the atonement, in their theology, occupies quite a subordinate place in contrast with the relation of Christ and his work to the deliverance

⁶ *De Vera Relig.* I. 16.

⁷ *History of Christian Doctrine*, p. 180-1.

The Atonement

of man from the power and subjective consequences of sin. Even Augustine is not wholly an exception to this. This is to be accounted for in that they seem to grasp in one conception the atonement, "Christ lifted up," and its effects upon man in relation to sin. Another cause for this may be found, especially with the Greek, in his high conception or sense of the power of sin and its dire spiritual effects upon man, as contrasted with his low sense or feeling of guilt. Another dominant idea in Greek theology is the soul's deep need of enlightenment and the regaining of that knowledge of God which he lost through sin. For all these losses and crosses which are the effects of sin, these fathers found a full and complete panacea in the vicarious atonement, in some sense, of Christ, the world's Redeemer and Saviour.

2. The Anselmic theory.

The interpretations given by the church fathers in explanation of the atonement had grown old and become unsatisfactory to men who thought for themselves. In this state of unrest, in the eleventh century, an Italian by the name of Anselm arose. He was a man of letters and a devout student of the Scriptures. He was not satisfied

The Atonement

with the interpretations which had obtained of old relative to the atonement, so he set to work to find a more satisfactory solution of the problem. He scientifically defined the views which had been implicitly received by the fathers in his "*Cur Deus Homo.*" He sees the ground of the incarnation in the absolute need of an atonement for sin. He held to the view that the atonement by Christ was actively a vicarious satisfaction, but not passively so; and that sin is debt, and under the divine government it must of necessity be paid, which payment, implying the guilt of sin, is suffering, and must be endured. He assumed that sin against an infinite being was an infinite debt. A finite being cannot pay an infinite debt. Hence the infinite must become incarnate, "God manifest in the flesh," if the debt would be paid. Christ died, and on the cross he paid the debt, and allows man to go free. Anselm and his followers clearly recognize the twofold nature of Christ, human and divine, and find in him all the legal qualifications for his office as high priest, and at the same time a full and complete sacrifice to meet all the demands of the divine government.

Says Dr. Fisher: "Anselm's view is that a debt

The Atonement

is due to God, and that amends must be made for the dishonor to him. This satisfaction is not said to be the vicarious endurance of the penalty of sin. No stress is laid on the sufferings of Christ. It is not his passive obedience that satisfies; nor is it the active obedience of Christ simply considered. It is the supererogatory gift of his life. It was an act of obedience, but a supererogatory act of obedience. Therein lies its merit, its moral value, its capacity to procure forgiveness for the ill deserving.”⁸ The best of the schoolmen agreed with Anselm on the moral necessity for the atonement, but held also that God possessed the power to forgive sins by mere will. This likely grew out of their metaphysical notions of omnipotence.

Also, the ancient Waldenses and the reformers before the Reformation adhered strictly to the Anselmic views of the atonement, and so forceful and vital is his doctrine that it has subsequently, with perhaps some slight modifications, been adopted in the whole Christian church. The creed form is, “Jesus Christ who, when we were enemies, merited justification for us by his most sacred passion on the tree, and satisfied the Father for us.”⁹

⁸ *Hist. of Christian Doctrine*, p. 221.

⁹ *Dec. Cont. Trent. Less. 6, Ch. 7.*

The Atonement

3. The ethical theory.

This moral influence theory is the development of Abelard's views and teaching of the atonement. According to this great man, God's perfections consisted in his benevolence and liberty of indifference. He taught that sin could be abolished simply by the volition of the Almighty and the sinner restored to the favor of God at will. This theory teaches that in the death of Christ there is no penal element, and it is not intended in any sense to be a satisfaction of divine justice for sin. He did not come into the world to die for sin, but, being in the world, he died, and died the death of a martyr. But the death of Christ is not without merit, which merit is effective upon the hearts and characters of men, in touching, softening, and disposing them to righteousness. Wendt contends that to Christ "death was an after-thought, that he began his public ministry with no anticipation of such a doom; . . . it was only in the last months of his life that the certainty of his death in conflict with the world began to dawn upon him."¹⁰ With Abelard, Christ's death had a double purpose: first, to subdue rebellion in man,

¹⁰ *Studies in Theology*, by Denny, p. 134.

The Atonement

and, secondly, to remove his guilty fears by the transcendent exhibition of divine love, as benevolence is the only divine attribute active in human redemption.

Socinus accepted the views of Abelard, but found an additional reason for the death of Christ, by which he brought life and immortality to light by his own resurrection. Dr. F. D. Maurice taught that Christ's sufferings and death were the only example of a complete self-surrender of the spirit and body to God accomplished, the design of which was "to illustrate the principle of self-sacrifice as due from all God's intelligent creatures to him who made them."¹¹ Dr. Bushnell and Dr. J. McLeod Campbell are earnest advocates of this theory. Dr. Bushnell's conception of the death of Christ was that he "suffered with us through sympathy and fellowship," by which he obtains a moral power over men, and through love and example inspires spiritual life and love in them. His best thought on this subject is found in his treatise on "Vicarious Sacrifice," where he gives his views of the moral view of the atonement, "the renewing influence upon charac-

¹¹ *Theological Essays*, London, 1853.

The Atonement

ter which flows out from Christ, from sympathy and suffering with us, and his whole collective manifestation.”

According to Dr. Campbell, Christ, in his sufferings and death, has so identified himself with man as a sinner and the righteous law he has broken, “that he has offered up to God a perfect confession and adequate repentance to God of man’s sins. Christ made an expiatory confession of man’s sin, which was a perfect amen in humanity to the judgment of God on the sin of man.”¹² Christ was one with God respecting man’s sin, in his condemnation and in his love to the sinner. In his self-sacrifice and his willingly and freely submitting to the death of the cross, he expressed “the ideal and representative repentance of mankind for sin.”¹³ While Dr. Campbell is classed with the advocates of the Moral Theory of the atonement, he surely goes beyond it. He makes the incarnation and death of Christ necessary, that he might personally “realize God’s feeling and man’s need.” He adds, “As our Lord alone truly tasted death, so to him alone had death its perfect meaning as the wages of sin, for

¹² *The Nature of the Atonement*, 3d Ed., p. 136.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 247 ff.

The Atonement

to him alone was there full entrance into the mind of God towards sin, and perfect unity with that mind."¹⁴

4. The governmental theory.

This theory is purely legal, and sets forth the fact that the law under which man is condemned, both in precept and penalty, is the product of the divine mind, and, as such, it is God's prerogative, as moral governor of the universe, to relax the penalty at will and free the condemned. Law not enforced and penalty not inflicted, but pardon granted instead, weaken government and remove a strong motive to obedience; therefore, to maintain good government, the benevolence of God demands that as a pre-condition of the forgiveness of any sinner, an example of punishment, as penalty due man's sins, be set before the race in the death of Christ as man's substitute for sin. Thus God gives to man the assurance by example that "the wicked shall not go unpunished," and sin not escape with impunity. While Hugo Grotius is the recognized founder of this theory, notwithstanding its defects, it has had many vigorous advocates, both in Europe and in America.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 302.

The Atonement

5. The mystical theory of the atonement.

The realistic and mystical theories of the atonement are modifications one of the other. Christ is represented as the head of the race and a typical man. The estrangement between God and man caused by sin is adjusted by Christ's reconciliation, which is accomplished by the mysterious union of God and man in the incarnation. Thus the ideal man, the head of our race, in his mysterious incarnation, is the world's reconciler with God and the adjuster of the estrangement between God and man. This view of the atonement may be traced from the days of the Platonizing father through the Middle Ages and the Reformation, down to the days of Schleiermacher and his disciples among the modern German theologians. All of these theories of the atonement named have much of truth in them, but no one of them has all the truth, to the exclusion of all error; they are human, not divine. They, however, show the struggle of truth, in its onward march to the perfecting of the kingdom of God among men. We call this progress, but it is, after all, that kind of progress which leads the patient, persistent truth-seeker back to the fountain-head of all re-

The Atonement

vealed truth,—the Word of God,—as the sheet-anchor of human hope.

Having stated in a brief way the leading theories of the atonement, but passed over many different views held by great and good men, we now come to make a few suggestions relative to this doctrine in the future. No doubt the present trend of theological thought is the necessity of a closer adherence to biblical teachings on all the great themes of man's salvation.

As to the atonement, the apostolic or scriptural theory or doctrine, in a brief form, is about this: *The putting away of sin, and reconciling the world to God by Christ in his death.* The analysis, then, of the atonement thus stated would be:

1. The ransom paid—*Christ's death upon the cross.*

2. The effects of it. (1) *The estrangement between God and man eliminated and the world reconciled to God.* (2) *The forgiveness of the sins of all men who repent and believe in Christ as their Saviour.* (3) *The resurrection of the dead and everlasting life to the obedient.* (4) *The complete vindication of the divine government and the restoration of harmony in the moral uni-*

The Atonement

verse, disturbed by sin, and every condition of justice and righteousness met in the divine administration.

Here we have, then, Christ's death upon the cross as the means by which he atoned for the world's sin, by which the world is reconciled to God, and the estrangement between God and man is eliminated, so that all who will may secure forgiveness of sins and obtain everlasting life. Christ's death is to be conceived as a sin-annulling death, "as putting away sin," because in that death "on him was laid the iniquity of us all," and "who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree, . . . by whose stripes ye were healed."¹⁵ He was the just one, yet he bare the world's sin and disposed of it and its condemnation, in a sense, that henceforth there is "no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." That is the ultimate fact in the death of Christ, which gives it significance and makes it vicarious; he took the place of another, the just for the unjust.

1. In the world's redemption, through Jesus Christ, the heart of God is revealed to man.

2. The gift of his Son is the highest exhibition of the love of the Father.

¹⁵ I. Pet. 2: 24.

The Atonement

(1) Jesus Christ is a self-revelation of God to man, through whom the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man is made manifest.

(2) In the world's redemption through Christ the loving heart of God as Father is revealed.

(3) God always loved man, but was grieved at his wickedness, and could not become reconciled to his sins; hence, by the putting away of sin by the death on the cross, the reconciliation of the world to God was effected, which was reciprocal in removing all estrangement between God and man.

(4) No correct interpretation of the atonement can be given, based upon any one metaphor or phase of the Scriptures, but all that Christ said and did, and what the apostles said is the true basis for its interpretation.

(5) The love of God as Father of our race is the golden center from which springs the exalted conception of the world's redemption by Christ. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not perish, but have everlasting life." The humanity of God, and how completely man may become enswathed in God, is like a new revelation

The Atonement

falling upon the church. Let this truth, then, rest with the one who reads these pages; namely, that no one can understand what Christ is or what he has done, unless he is led into all the truth by the Holy Spirit, who is the only revealer and interpreter of the truth.

CHAPTER V.

VIEWS OF THE ATONEMENT HELD BY THE CHURCH OF THE UNITED BRETHREN IN CHRIST.

THE atonement, as taught by the Church of the United Brethren in Christ, is set forth especially in the third article of its Confession of Faith. True, the word "atonement" nowhere occurs in the Confession, yet the doctrine is so clearly implied in the words, "*that this Jesus suffered and died upon the cross for us,*" that no mistake can be made as to the Church's belief in the vicarious atonement wrought out by Christ. In this same article his divine and human nature, his incarnation, his mediatorship, and the world's Saviour, are definitely declared of him, who put away sin by the sacrifice of himself, so that in this third article of the Confession, the substance, full and complete, of the atonement is, with sufficient distinctness, taught. It will be readily conceded that the Confession of Faith, as set forth in her Book of Dis-

The Atonement

cipline, contains the doctrines held by the United Brethren Church, and that her ministers and people are properly required to maintain these doctrines and their legitimate and rightful interpretation.

The absence of the word "atonement" from the thirteen articles of the Confession, as in the New Testament, and from the entire Discipline as well, is not to be interpreted as a license, granting privilege to any minister or layman of indulging his own peculiar conceptions or vagaries and teaching them respecting the atonement. This is evident from the fact that each member agrees to be governed by the Church Discipline, on his reception into the Church; and also every candidate for the ministry must subscribe to the Confession of Faith before he can receive license from the quarterly conference to preach. Also, the professors in the Church's Theological Seminary solemnly declare, "I believe the Confession of Faith, as contained in the thirteen articles in our Book of Discipline to be a truthful consensus of the fundamental doctrines of the Bible." They also "promise" not to teach or insinuate anything out of accord "with the Constitution and the Confession of

The Atonement

Faith and the rules of the Church as set forth in the Discipline of the United Brethren in Christ.”¹

The terms in the Confession convey the correct conception of the atonement, as well as imply the interpretation required by the Church, and the doctrine intended to be taught when the word is used. In the third article of the Confession not only is the doctrine in question unequivocally implied, but the price of the atonement and the effects accomplished by it are definitely stated. The terms used may not be strictly modern, but as to the essence of the doctrine, that is plain and easily understood, and may be traced to two sources: first, to the Holy Scriptures, and, second, to the teachings of the primitive church. The Apostles’ Creed, which stands in connection with the Church formulas in the Book of Discipline, is proof of this. The doctrine held by any church, to be of authority must be capable of being traced to the Word of God.

It is a little remarkable that the formulators of the thirteen articles of this Confession have succeeded so well in the selection of the term used as to cause no just ground for criticism on the creed

¹ Dis., p. 134.

The Atonement

of their Church. In the third article, the sufferings and death of Christ are stated to be "*for us*"; hence his death was vicarious. Its purpose was to eliminate the estrangement which sin had introduced between God and man. Christ in and by his death "put away sin," which was the cause of the estrangement, and thereby swept the estrangement out of the way, also. The effect was to reconcile the world to God, which, in a sense, was reciprocal, for the reason that man was in rebellion against God, and God was justly grieved at man's attitude toward him, and angry at man's sins; not angry at man, but grieved at him; yet he loved him. Christ nailed sin, that at which God was angry and which was the cause of his grief, to the cross, and put it out of the way, and thereby a reciprocal reconciliation was effected. In the same article, the universality of the atonement, with due limitations, is set forth. Christ is the "Saviour and Mediator of the whole human race," provided "they with full faith accept the grace proffered in Jesus."

It is the belief and teachings of this Church that all who die before they reach the years of accountability, and unaccountable adults, and all

The Atonement

adults who "with full faith accept the grace proffered in Jesus," will be saved through the atonement made by Christ, and that, although some will perish, it is not the fault of the atonement, but the fault of the one who perishes. "Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life."² The only bar to man's salvation is, he will not accept and comply with the conditions proffered in Jesus. Again, in the same third article, he is said to be man's present intercessor at the right hand of God in heaven, and that he will come in the last day to judge the living and the dead.

In this creed, also, the depravity of man is definitely stated in the eighth article, and his utter inability to extricate himself from sin is fully recognized; but through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ he may be inducted into the kingdom of God, "through the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he poured out upon us richly, through Jesus Christ our Saviour."³ Man, a sinner lost, and Christ, crucified, his complete, full, and perfect Saviour, Redeemer, and Lord, is the central truth in the United Brethren Confession, as it is the crowning glory of

² John 5: 40.

³ Titus 3: 5.

The Atonement

the gospel system of the world's redemption. "How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish unto God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?"⁴ Thus we have Christ in the entire sacred Scriptures, either directly or indirectly set forth as the world's one and only hope.

What an exalted view of Christ, the world's Saviour, Redeemer, and Lord, this is! The unfathomable richness of this atonement, in its height, breadth, and depth, and the unspeakable glory of Christ, its author, cannot be measured or comprehended by man, its recipient; but this truth must ever be kept before the world; namely, the Scriptures do not teach unconditional salvation to man by the atonement, but urge repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ as a vital condition of being saved and released from the power, condemnation, and punishment for sin. The atonement avails only upon personal acceptance of Christ and his pardon as made accessible in the atonement. Its infinite offer of a free and full pardon is the strongest possi-

⁴ Heb. 9: 14.

The Atonement

ble motive to repentance and faith in God, and to love and obey him. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" To reject or neglect it, deepens the awful doom that awaits the finally impenitent.

While our Church in its thirteen articles, and throughout its Book of Discipline, teaches the doctrine of *a full, perfect, and adequate atonement* for the sins of the whole human race, yet it does not attempt an explanation of how the death of Christ procured redemption and reconciliation for man. That is one of the inscrutable mysteries yet unrevealed, and belongs to the "secret things [which] belong unto the Lord our God."⁵ The fact is clearly and definitely affirmed in the Word of God, but no explanation given as to how; but that is God's way of putting things, just as he gives no explanation of the mode of the divine being only that God is a spirit. In the divine Word, facts are stated which are to be believed, not questioned. There was nothing more marked in the life of Jesus, while among men, than some of his bold and daring statements respecting himself, his missions, and the kingdom of God, but with-

⁵ Deut. 29: 29.

The Atonement

out explanation. Yet this inscrutable mystery is no objection to the profound fact which underlies it; namely, that Christ, by the sacrifice of himself, "put away sin." There are many facts in nature which face man from infancy to old age which are inscrutable, yet he acknowledges their reality. Indeed, the whole sphere of human knowledge is shadowed by an impenetrable veil. The men of science do not claim to explain every fact which exists in nature, just as the wise theologian does not assume to explain all the mysteries connected with the kingdom of God.

The chief difficulty with the many defective theories of the atonement is due to attempts to explain what has not been written, or cater to pre-conceived opinions with what has been written, rather than to accept a logical interpretation of what the Scriptures contain on the subject. When the Word states that Christ "tasted death for every man"; "who his own self bare our sins in his body upon the tree"; that he gave "himself a ransom for many"; and that by his "stripes ye were healed"; who "reconciled us to himself" through Christ, and many more scriptures of a like character, an attempt to interpret them

The Atonement

on grounds other than a vicarious atonement is to nullify them, and render them nugatory altogether. What motive or purpose of the incarnation, or explanation of the terms used in Holy Writ, expressive of atonement and redemption, can be given by him who rejects the doctrine of the atonement? He who believes that the relation of God as Father to man is such as to secure him salvation without the possibility of a forfeiture, or holds that God could forgive the world's sin simply on the grounds of repentance, without an atonement, cannot claim logically that man's salvation here and his blessedness in heaven are the result of Christ's advent to the world. Let him account intelligently for the sufferings and death of Christ by which the apostle says, "He put away the world's sins."

No intelligent Christian fails to be impressed with the benefits and blessings to our cold world of humanity from the example of obedience, sympathy, and love manifest in the life of our blessed Lord while among men, and that it was of the highest utility to our race; but it was not salvation, and he did not proclaim it as such, nor did the apostles preach it as such, but as high priest,

The Atonement

in the offering up of himself in death upon the cross, he "put away sin" and redeemed man from the curse of the law and purchased his salvation. Ritschl, whose school is now dominant in Germany, and is ethical in theory, taught in substance that "Christ redeemed us from death, as the debt of nature, by showing us how to trust God's love even in that extremity";⁶ but the New Testament teaches that Christ redeemed us from death, as "the wages of sin," by dying for us and bearing our sins. The Word says, "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be a propitiation for our sins," and "that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." These two passages mean about the same thing, for the Scriptures elsewhere represent Christ's death as the propitiation for man's sin.

This act of God giving his Son to be made "sin for us who knew no sin," that we might obtain forgiveness of sins, the laying of our sins on him who was willing to bear them and able to put them away, that they might lay no more on us, is regarded in the divine Word as a manifestation of the culmination of the Father's love. To inter-

*Studies in Theology, Denny, p. 143.

The Atonement

pret God's love other than this "is at best meaningless, and ethically indifferent." So we believe and so we teach.

To summarize, then, the conception of the atonement as taught in the United Brethren Confession:

1. Christ by his suffering and death upon the cross made an atonement for the sins of the whole world.

2. That this atonement is full, perfect, and adequate to put away sin, and meets all the claims of the divine government.

3. That by it the divine administration is vindicated, and its rights are maintained.

4. That by means of this atonement, "through repentance towards God and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ," all may be saved.

5. That redemption, probation, pardon, adoption, justification, sanctification, the resurrection from the dead, and eternal life, are effects of the atonement.

All these doctrines were maintained and preached by Bishop Otterbein, the founder of the denomination, and are held by it at the present time. In a word, it is the purpose of the United

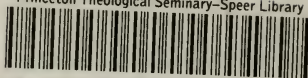
The Atonement

Brethren in Christ to include in its Confession all that the New Testament teaches on the doctrine of the atonement, no difference how imperfectly expressed in creed or taught by preacher, and thus include all the great truths held and taught by the multitude of theories on this subject, to the exclusion of error. What might have been the line in which man's destiny would have been fulfilled had he always remained loyal to the throne of heaven, the Word of God says nothing, and no one can tell; but he did not, and sin entered, and death by sin; but that man is constituted for immortality and has the promise of it in his being from the first, forbids us to ascribe to death a natural and inevitable place in his career. It is an intrusion, and by the atonement it is put away, abolished.

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A brief treatise on the atonement,

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